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ABSTRACT

Connections between the international exchange of persons and the larger system for the exchange of knowledge are discussed, along with the use of policy-relevant knowledge. Two examples of knowledge exchange are considered: (1) judgments about quality in higher education policy in Britain and the United States; and (2) the construction of new campus-to-campus relationships between U.S. and Chinese universities. Extensive knowledge flow between Great Britain and the United States is linked to political and economic factors that have posed similar problems to higher education. The connection between the exchange of persons and other channels for communication is apparent at two levels: many U.S. and British policymakers have spent substantial time in the other country as students and professionals; and many difficult decisions have been made using similar standards of judgment with only limited understanding of how similar problems are confronted in the other country. U.S. and Chinese exchanges, on the other hand, have involved a relatively small number of u.S. campuses, and the growth of other knowledge exchange systems has been much more limited and largely one way (from the United States to China), since relationships have been dependent upon formal systems. Six questions for further consideration are posed. (SW)

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THE INTERNATIONAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM: TRANSFER AND THE TRANSFERORS -- TRANSFORMING THE SYSTEM

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The International Knowledge System:

Transfer and the Transferors -- Transforming the System

During the last few years, I have used the occasion of a paper presented to an ISA meeting to explore various facets of the evolution of the international knowledge system and to suggest connections between the exchange of persons and the exchange of knowledge.(1) Much of my research has been based upon my work in the area of higher education policy and participant-observation of the use of international and comparative knowledge in the evolution of national policies in the United States and Europe.

In this paper I wish to address further the policy issues posed by my understanding of the connection between the exchange of persons and the larger international system for the exchange of knowledge. I especially wish to pose some specific questions for empirical research and suggest the appropppriate methods for such research. My illustrations in the initial recapitulation of the connection will be personal and anecdotal -- for which I do not apologize, since I think the texture of the concrete is far more valuable than the abstraction of the more social scientific. However, I strongly believe we need to make our collection of anecdotes more systematic and organized to test assumptions. Today you must forebear the illustrative, not the systematic.

I am reminded of the title of the article by Aaron Wildavsky and Jack Knott, "If Dissemination is the Solution, What is the Problem?"(2) I would paraphrase that question in this case: "if exchange of knowledge (or of persons) is the answer, what is the problem?" Why do we worry about whether and how knowledge is exchanged between and among countries and different nationalities? Is this a matter of policy interest? Is it a matter of social scientific interest?

The questions are serious because of the values of peace and justice as well as national interest. Although most of us are interested in these questions in part because of their intrinsic scholarly merit, I have observed over the years that in fact there are important social value justifications to which most of us are explicitly committed but which we seldom clearly connect to our scholarly inquiry.

It borders on the cliche to suggest that the more we understand each other, the more likely we are to be able to maintain a peaceful world order. This particular cliche has never been tested empirically, and the anecdotal evidence is quite mixed. But the question about the importance of the international exchange of knowledge certainly bears some relationship to our understanding of the conditions for world peace.

Justice as a justifying value for an interest in the international exchange of knowledge is actually based upon the logic of the value more than empirical connections. If in fact we have a value of fairness, access to knowledge regardless of contingent realities such as national borders must be rationed only by principles of fairness if we all, by virtue of our humanness, have a right to fair treatment.

Finally, national interest may not counsel unlimited exchange of knowledge or persons -- indeed Secretaries Weinberger and Baldridge have made careers out of mounting the counterargument and fighting between themselves for the title of chief protector of national knowledge -- but it certainly argues for sharing knowledge widely and encouraging the exchange of persons in order to improve the understanding by one nation's citizens of other countries. There is an assumption -- once again empirically questionable -- that "to know us is to love us."

One multifaceted question then, to which the exchange of knowledge and persons is the answer, is "What strategies will allow us to increase the probabilities of world peace, act fairly between nations, and advance the national interest?" That the open exchange of knowledge and exchange of persons is the correct answer to the question must be examined and evaluated, not just accepted on faith.

Before suggesting how we might test whether the answer given is to the question posed, I wish to spend a few moments exploring the connection between the exchange of persons and the exchange of knowledge. The other participants in this panel will offer cases which address this question, so I wish only to highlight some features of the nexus which can inform the cases.

To illustrate the complex connections between the exchange of persons and the larger international knowledge system, I wish to offer two examples of knowledge exchange which are in process and in which I am playing an initiating role. I use these two examples because they allow me to explore these connections but also because they allow me to test the connections in a policy

relevant setting. The first involves mutual exploration of the role of judgments about quality in higher educational policy in Britain and the United States; the second focuses on the construction of new campus-to-campus relationships between universities in the United States and China.

When we look at the international knowledge system as it functions in the interaction between two post-industrial countries, we find porous borders through which knowledge flows at most points on the touching surfaces at all times. The major change of the past two decades has been expanding areas of contact and the speed and pressure of the flow between the surfaces.

In the case of higher educational policy in the United States and Great Britain, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, the model of one system for the other played only a minimal role but strategically there was one important connection: the Robbins Commission, which mapped the expansion of British higher education, took its general policy position from an understanding of the structure of expansion of higher educational opportunity in the United States. Yet the evolution of British higher education under the Robbins mandate replicated the traditional British system of university education, with only rare exceptions.

In the 1970s, one innovation in British higher education was taken as exemplary in the United States and many other countries -- the British Open University. But here the model was adapted and implemented in the US only rarely.

Throughout these three decades, the exchange of persons between Britain and the US enlarged substantially and, equally importantly, the networks of communication about higher educational policy became more extensive and elaborate. For example, the Times Higher Education Supplement became available by air mail in a timely fashion, and the THES covered American higher education regularly. The Chronicle of Higher Education initiated regular coverage of international news, particularly from a stringer in Great Britain.

Most importantly in generating more extensive and intensive flow of knowledge between the two countries was an evolving political and economic reality which posed similar problems to the systems of higher education. The similarity of problems posed by hard times but the distinction in national cultures and policy responses made the policy approaches of one country of interest to those in the other.

The connection between the exchange of persons and other channels for communication is apparent at two levels. First, there were (and are) actors in the national policy arenas of both countries who have spent substantial parts of their student and professional careers in the other. For example, the former Chair of the Committee of Vice Chancellors during the first Thatcher cuts of higher education in Britain, was Geoffrey Caston, who had a graduate fellowship for study at Harvard and who spent a number of months at various times in his life in the US. (I believe he may have an American wife as well. The role of an international spouse should never be underestimated.) Other actors including the senior staff of the University Grants Committee had spent time in the US. One of the more controversial vice chancellors at the time of the cuts was Frederick Crawford, a former professor of physics at Stanford and a nationally active leader in the AAUP. So the nodes of connection were place throughout the interstices of the British higher education system.

In the United States, similarly, many campus-based leaders had extensive experience and continuing interest in the British higher educational system. I, of course, at the national level regularly drew on the emerging British experience for comparative purposes and actually took some specific policy examples from the British to argue our American case.

It is clear that on both sides of the Atlantic, there were many who knew well the other side and who could interpret with sophisticated context the regular flow of information from the other side. The fact that there were a number of informed actors with great experience with the other culture meant that the continuing flow of information could be easily transformed into policy-relevant knowledge in the other policy-making system.

Two features of the use of policy-relevant knowledge need to be kept in mind. First, the exchange has been to date quite informal, but that informality is about to change, and the conditions of that change are interesting. One of the major issues on the British side has been the nature of tenure in the British system. Claims for absolute tenure after no more than three years in the system are characteristic on most campuses. Sir Keith Joseph, the Secretary of Education and Science, has mounted a continuing attack on tenure. The moderate response to that attack has been reference to the American system which allows some conditions for termination because of financial exigency but which still has a strong institution of tenure. Now the debate is becoming more formal and there is likely to be a parliamentary commission on tenure which will be charged to

review the American system for its relevance to British problems.

The second feature of the connection to date has been that many difficult decisons have been made using similar standards of judgment with only an implicit and dated understanding of how similar problems are confronted in the other country, though the nature of those judgments has been quite similar. The understanding of the possiblity of explicitly useful knowledge from the other country which has been operating in the tenure debate has not been made explicit in the judgment making process about resource allocation at the national level, although sensitivity to the place of a particular campus department in its own knowledge system has always been one element in the judgment about quality in universities on both sides of the Atlantic. Now the possibility that a more explicit understanding about how we make judgments about quality might be useful in the national policy process has motivated both scholars and policy makers in the US and Great Britain to become more interested in formally comparing notes on this topic.

The Association of American Colleges and the Society for Research in Higher Education are exploring a cooperative project analysing standards of quality to be used in national and campus decison-making. This trans-Atlantic dialogue may become an important policy-relevant forum for those in both systems of higher education.

So the British-American connection in higher education policy displays the interrelationship between the exchange of persons and the exchange of knowledge. The history of exchange of important actors in the policy systems both when they were bit players -- in other words, through student exchanges -- and the continuing exchange of visits by more senior scholars and officials makes it possible for the policy actors to use the flow of journalistic communication and personal correspondence to inform the policy judgments on both sides of the Atlantic. The most important channels are usually informal, but the existence of these channels allows the evolution to more formal points of contact at politically strategic moments. It is critical to understand that the effectiveness of the international knowledge exchange system is dependent upon the political receptivity of the national system for the use of the results of the international exchanges. That receptivity is contingent both upon domestic political realities and the political support for the infrastructure of the international knowledge and exchange of persons system. In the case of Britain and the US, both are in place.

The second case I wish to consider is a nascent set of exchanges with the People's Republic of China. Since the reopening of diplomatic relations with China during the Nixon years, the network of exchange of persons has grown significantly through a series of ad hoc exchanges involving a relatively small number of US campuses. However, the growth of the other knowledge exchange systems has been much more limited and very much one way: from the US to China. Knowledge about domestic trends in the People's Republic is still the bailiwick of a handful of scholars with knowledge of Chinese and the experiences of the mainland. We see in the present and recent past an extreme case of the typical relationship between post-industrial and third world countries, where the exchange of persons is very much a flow from the South to the North and the flow of knowledge and the impact of the internatonal knowledge system is the other direction.

In this setting of high level exchange but limited flow of persons from the North to the South, I shall be leading, through the good offices of the US China Scientific Exchanges, one of the first multi-institution negotiating teams to talk directly with a number of individual campuses to try to move the exchange of persons between the US and the People's Republic to a much larger population.

Because of the paucity of informal networks in the connections between China and the US, we are dependent upon the formal systems. The cost of connecting the two systems is therefore far greater, not only because of distance in geography and culture, but also because of the political barriers which must be overcome before even the most rudimentary interrelatonships are developed. When the exchange of persons and the exchange of knowledge are dependent upon formal agreements and systems of exchange, the opportunities in terms of quantity and quality are always going to be limited. The correlation between stages of development and extent of the network is illustated not only in the contrast between the Chinese and British connections but also in the differences between the Chinese and Japanese. The limitations of initial formality should never be underestimated.

The potential payoff of substantial investment in exchange of persons as a way of strengthening other means of communication is highlighted by the ease of exchange which follows from a long history such as the British and American exchanges. It will undoubtedly be a generation before anything approaching this level of exchange can occur with the People's Republic.

It is fascinating to contrast the role of formality in the two relationships. In the British setting, the evolving formality is actually a way for legitimating the use of knowledge exchange in formal policy-making. The blessing of a parliamentary commission will make the use of the American system of tenure kosher in Great Britain. Whereas the initial formality of exchanges with China has severely limited the availability of knowledge about the American system which the Chinese goverment now clearly views as valuable to its development strategy. In the Chinese case the challenge will be to move past formality to informality through large-scale exchange. In the British case, the selective use of formality will integrate comparative policy knowledge into the domestic political reality. Jointly examined policy options through working parties involving the British and the Americans could well develop policy guidance with authority in both countries just because it is informed by both experiences.

These two illustrative examples provide us with no definitive answers to questions about the relationship between the exchange of persons and the operation of the larger system for the exchange of knowledge. But they do suggest questions for further research in order to generate some explanations of the dynamics of the relationship and also to provide further policy guidance. I would pose the following questions for further consideration:

1. How does the relative economic development of the two exchange partners affect the extent and nature of the exchange?

2. How do the formal systems for knowledge exchange affect the informal systems, and vice versa? What are the stages of evolution of the exchange process?

3. What is the relationship between the realities of domestic politics and the politics of international exchange?

4. Does a history of exchange of persons affect the operation of the other systems of knowledge exchange?

5. What is the impact of cultural diversity between partners on the exchange process?

6. Will the technological revolution of the telecommunications industry affect the efficiency and effectiveness of the exchange of persons and other modes of exchange such as publications?

There are of course many other questions which require

further investigation if we are to understand better the nature of the knowledge exchange system generally and the connection between exchange of persons and the larger system in particular.

The approach which is most likely to focus the spotlight of explanation is one which takes the question, posits a hypothetical answer and then collects substantial case material organized around the theme. These questions will not be answered by surveys or controlled experiments. Historians, anthropologists, and journalists have more to contribute than quantifiers.

The importance of this research and one constructive approach to it is best illustrated by an article analysing the role of Paul Lazarsfeld in the transformation of both American and European sociology. Michael Pollak identified Lazarsfeld's role in the evolution of sociology because of his movement from Europe to the US and then involvement back again: "In a word, he was a mediator, conversant in realms usually kept separate, but needing to be joined in social research."(3) People who move from one culture to another, from one tradition to another, but who maintain connections with their original or their once visited environment, play a critical role in mediating knowledge flow.

The complex nature of the choices involved in this mediating role is also indicated in Pollak's analysis: "By minimizing theoretical preoccupations and the political concerns for social reform characterizing his Austrian writings, Lazarsfeld forged a sociology adapted to the constraints of the research market as defined by the social forces in power at a given time. His case illustrates that it is impossible to separate in a distinct way the analysis of scientific and political aspects of career choice."(4) I would add that one must understand the dynamics of the mix between the disciplinary and the political aspects of the exchange of knowledge which characterize the evolution of all disciplines through the people engaged as laborers and leaders in these fields. The international knowledge system is in fact a web of persons not a net of technologies. Our research needs to understand better how this mix churns.

All of our research is affected by the values informing our choice of this set of problems. The values I identified at the outset of this essay are, I think, those which guide both the research and the policy. In this essay I shall not attempt to explore in detail the impact of each value or the ordering of them on the research tasks before us. That they are relevant

must always be in mind. Also, the need to understand the facts which affect the implementation of the value positions should inform our development of policy. As I proceed to initiate new exchanges with the People's Republic of China or to structure a dialogue with the British about quality in domestic higher education policy, I need to devise ways to test whether the enterprise actually improves the liklihood for peace, increases justice and fairness, or in some way advances an identifiable national interest. These justifications will actually work if, and only if, we can display realities flowing from the exchange of knowledge which actually achieve some or all of these goals.

The anecdotal evidence suggests that that the transferors can transform some systems if they understand both the goals and the opportunities. Let's find out more about the system so that we can take more initiatives in the transfer of knowledge but at the same time hedge some of our bets.

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NOTES

1. Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr. "Movers and Doers," International Studies Association Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia March, 1984.

2. Knowledge, Vol.1, No.4. June 1980, pp.537-578.

3. "Paul F. Lazarsfeld: A Sociointellectual Biography," Knowledge, vol.2 No.2 December 1980, p163.

4. ibid, p171.